

If wreaths were originall y amulets parents were both alive was entrusted with the duty of cutting or wearing a sacred wreath at a great festival which recurred at intervals of several years.<sup>1</sup>

Why a boy of living parents should be chosen for such an office is not at first sight clear; the reason might be more obvious if we understood the ideas in which the custom of wearing wreaths and crowns had its origin. Probably in many cases wreaths and crowns were amulets before they were ornaments; in other words, their first intention may have been not so much to adorn the head as to protect it from harm by surrounding it with a plant, a metal, or any other thing which was supposed to possess the magical virtue of banning baleful influences. Thus the Arabs of Moab will put a circlet of copper on the head of a man who is suffering from headache, for they believe that this will banish the pain; and if the pain is in an arm or a leg, they will treat the ailing limb in like manner. They think that red beads hung before the eyes of children who are afflicted with ophthalmia will rid them of the malady, and that a red ribbon tied to the foot will prevent it from stumbling on a stony path.<sup>2</sup> Again, the Melanesians of the Gazelle Peninsula in New Britain often deck their dusky bodies with

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that the old octennial cycle in Greece, based on an attempt to harmonize solar and lunar time, gave rise to an octennial festival at which the mythical marriage of the sun and moon was celebrated by the dramatic marriage of human actors, who appear sometimes to have been the king and queen. In the Laurel-bearing at Thebes a clear reference to the astronomical character of the festival is contained in the emblems of the sun, moon, stars, and clays of the year which were carried in procession (Proclus, *Lc.* } *i* and another reference to it may be detected in the legendary marriage of Cadmus and Harmonia. Dr. L. R. Farnell supposes that the festival of the Laurel-bearing "belongs to the maypole processions, universal in the peasant-religion of Europe, of which the object is to quicken the vitalizing powers of the year in the middle of spring or at the beginning of summer" (*The Cults of the Greek States*, iv. 285).

But this explanation appears to be inconsistent with the octennial period of the festival.

<sup>1</sup> We may conjecture that the Olympic, like the Delphic and the Theban, festival was at first octennial, though in historical times it was

quadrennial. Certainly it seems to have been based on an octennial cycle.

See the Scholiast on Pindar, *Olymp.*

iii. 35 (20); Aug. Boeckh on Pindar,

*Explicationes* (Leipsic, 1821), p. 138

; L. Ideler, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie*,

i. 366

*sq.*; G. F. Unger, "Zeitrechnung der

Griechen und Römer," in Iwan Müller's

*Handbuch der klassischen Altertums-*

*wissenschaft*, i. (Nordlingen, 1886)

pp. 605 *sq.* K. O. Müller, *Die Dörfer\**

(Breslau, 1844), ii. 483. The Pythian

games, which appear to have been at

first identical with the Delphic Festival

of Crowning, were held originally at

intervals of eight instead of four years.

See the Scholiast on Pindar, *Pyth.*

Argum. p. 298, ed. A. Boeckh (Leipsic,

1819); Censorinus, *De die natali*,

xviii. 6; compare Eustathius on Homer,

*Od.* iii. 267, p. 1466. 29. As to the

original identity of the Pythian games

and the Festival of Crowning see Th.

Schreiber, *Apollo ft Pythoktonos* (Leip-

sic, 1879), pp. 37 *sq.*; A. B. Cook,

"The European Sky-God," *Folklore*

xv. (1904) pp. 404 *sq.*

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Jaussen, *Coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moab* (Paris,

1908),

p. 352.